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Lucia A Keegan 08/10/2006 09:30:31 AM From DB/Inbox: Lucia A Keegan

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TAGS: OPRC KMDR FR

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Middle East - U.S. Policy -
Lebanese Conflict
PARIS - Wednesday, August 09, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Middle East - U.S. Policy - Lebanese Conflict

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

Israel's expanded ground offensive, despite Lebanon's offer to deploy troops in Southern Lebanon remains the lead international story. TF1 opened its evening newscast on the intensification of the aerial strikes in South Lebanon, emphasizing the insulation of the region. Every network mentioned that Tsahal is getting ready for a massive attack in the South, "to weaken Hezbollah before the cease-fire", said a FR2 reporter. Liberation's front page reads: "Tyr Under Siege," while Le Figaro headlines: "Israel Preparing New Ground Offensive." In its editorial, Liberation contends that "Israel has fallen into the trap set by Syria and Iran." (See Part C)

Popular France Soir devotes its lead to France's participation in an international force: "Should it or Shouldn't It?" asks the headline. France Soir interviews Pascal Boniface, director of the Institute of International and Strategic Relations, about sending French troops to Lebanon. While Boniface says France's military and diplomatic capacities make sending troops "tempting," he claims a ceasefire and a political accord are prerequisites to any international force. Boniface advises against placing the force under NATO's command: "For many, that would pass for an alignment with the American policy, which is not well regarded at this moment in the region."

Liberation analyzes the "tug of war between the U.S. and France at the UN" and contends that on the French side, "there is little optimism" after President Bush's remarks from Crawford that "asking Israel to withdraw was out of the question." France, says Liberation, "must now stretch its position in order to stay in tune with Washington, all the while retaining some credibility with Beirut." Liberation quotes Francois Gere of the Institute of Strategic Analysis: "France wanted to play a key role, it is now caught between a rock and a hard place."

Liberation also carries an open letter signed by famous French Jewish intellectuals entitled "We, Jews Against Israel's Strikes." On the same page a Liberation opinion penned by the editor in Chief of the Jewish Radio station 'Radio Communauté Juive' comments: "The conflict is described as an army against civilians ... but in truth this is a war pitting one army against another: Hezbollah."

Le Figaro carries an op-ed by Parliamentarian Pierre Lellouche on Iran's new strategic positioning in the Middle East, while Le Monde carries two opinion pieces analyzing U.S. policy in the Middle East. (See Part C)

Oliver Stone's film on 9/11, "World Trade Center" is prominently featured on the cover of Le Figaro's cultural section, calling it a "tribute to the victims" which "avoids controversy." The main editorial in Le Figaro is devoted to "Hollywood and 9/11." For Nicolas Barre, the five year hiatus since the tragedy, "for a nation that excels in telling its own story, illustrates the magnitude of the trauma." Barre finds it is "indicative that Stone is using the traditional American myth of ordinary men to tell this story." Barre also explains how 9/11 has marked the beginning of America as "vulnerable." "What good is America's supremacy if it cannot protect it from attacks on its own soil?" Barre concludes by saying that "far from the U.S., it is difficult to assess the impact of the tragedy on America." Barre also adds: "America's soft power is no longer what it used to be. We can see this in the Middle East... And the world unfortunately is no better for it."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Middle East - U.S. Policy - Lebanese Conflict

"Into the Trap"

Pierre Haski in left-of-center Liberation (08/09): "A Lebanese deployment will not put an end to the conflict... The problem is that while diplomacy moves at a snail's pace, Israel continues to escalate its ground offensive... This escalation is the result of Israel's initial failures and the lack of military training of Olmert and Peretz, who have led Israel into a dead end and fallen into the trap set by Damascus and Tehran... Israel has managed to shift, in the eyes of the world, from victim to aggressor and to turn Hezbollah into an ambiguous hero, re-instating Syria in the Lebanese equation."

"Siniora Wants Tsahal to Pull Out"

Georges Malbrunot in right-of-center Le Figaro (08/09): "Fouad Siniora's offer to deploy his troops and impose an Israeli pullout is a proposal saluted by France. But Washington and London do not see it as justification enough for Tsahal to withdraw... Hezbollah's acceptance of the Lebanese offer is the first indication since the start of the conflict that Hezbollah is putting the local situation before its own agenda with Iran."

"A Strategic Revolution in the Middle East"

Parliamentarian Pierre Lellouche in right-of-center Le Figaro (08/09): "The present situation is nothing less than a strategic

revolution in which the Lebanese war is a rehearsal for a much more general and fundamental conflict... Iran has operated a strategic revolution in the region... And it is the tug of war between Iran and the international community that served as detonator to the conflict with Hezbollah. Iran's strategy has been successful since it is reaping the most benefits from the conflict... While a ceasefire is essential for humanitarian reason, it or a UN presence is sufficient for lasting peace without disarming Hezbollah. Anything less than that is preparing ourselves for serious consequences."

"Does Islamism Equal Totalitarianism"

Daniel Vernet in left-of-center *Le Monde* (08/09): "For G.W. Bush the offensive against Hezbollah is part of the 'war against terror...' For Bush, and Blair, this new Middle East confrontation is perceived as 'an episode in the confrontation between the democratic and liberal West and fundamentalist Islam...'. This view is shared by many 'liberals' in the U.S., not just a handful of neo-cons... The fear of a clash between civilizations prevails among Europeans and Americans alike, who want to avoid a political and moral confrontation with Islam... But although fundamentalist Islam is a totalitarian ideology, which at times uses terrorism, and must be fought, we cannot compare it to the totalitarian states of the 20th century... Traditional means will not overcome fundamentalism and its ambitions. To make an error in diagnosis means to give out the wrong medication, which will lead to new catastrophes. Like Iraq."

"President Bush's Failed Strategy"

Gilles Kepel of Science Po in left-of-center *Le Monde* (08/09): "The simultaneous wars in Lebanon and Gaza demonstrate the failure of the policy led by the U.S. in the Middle East and its inability to secure the region, through the use of unilateral force, and on the heels of the Iraqi fiasco... Israel fears that the road to Haifa and Tel Aviv passes through Tehran and that the U.S., mired in Baghdad, is unable to guarantee its security... To this disaster in America's security policy in the Middle East one must add the failed democratic engineering which was supposed to spread from Iraq to Palestine and from Egypt to Saudi Arabia... Recent Islamic electoral victories are the illustration of the people's rejection of America's unilateralism... This is why democratization is no longer Washington's priority... The irony is that Lebanon, the only country where Islamists were not elected to power, feels abandoned by the U.S. ... Iran has the most to gain from the present conflict... Only a European initiative can help stop the spiral of violence."

STAPLETON